

U.S. Naval Air Station,  
Commandant's Offices (Building 34)  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida

HABS No. FL-214

HABS  
FLA,  
17-PENSA,  
68-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-214

U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION,  
COMMANDANT'S OFFICES  
(BUILDING 34)

Location: U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Escambia County, Florida.

Present Owner: Commanding Officer.

Present Use: VIP Guest House.

Significance: The building is architecturally significant for its two stories of peripteral cast-iron columns of the veranda and the gallery.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1873.
2. Architect: The building appears identical to the former Marine Hospital in Galena, Illinois, designed by Ammi B. Young.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building has been the property of the U.S. Navy during its entire history.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Construction of the building was done by local craftsmen and laborers under the direction of Civil Engineer.
5. Original plans and construction: The building was designed for use as the Commandant's offices. It was constructed on the site of the original commandant's office which was octagonal in plan, and was destroyed during the Civil War. In 1866, \$22,174 was requested to reconstruct the building. Finally, in 1872, \$29,000 was provided and the new building was completed in 1873. The two-story building had approximately 4,608 square feet of space equally divided between the two floors each with 2,304 square feet (48'x48'). Cost of construction was figured at \$29,942.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1908 extensive repairs were made to the building as a result of the damage from the hurricane of September 1906. An important modification came in 1915 when it was converted from an office building into bachelor officer's quarters. Major 1931 improvements and changes include the addition of a stairway and the east and west bathrooms. Alterations to steam heating and steam service to the building occurred in 1937 and 1947. Other minor alterations have been

made including the connection of the building to the local fire alerting system in 1947. The next important renovation was in 1958 when the building was made into the V.I.P. Guest House. Miss Betty Southerland Cunningham of Norfolk, Virginia, was the interior decorator for the remodeled building. The building was converted into four suites at the time with one large suite on the second floor and three smaller suites on the first floor. In 1968 the brick was sandblasted and completely repointed above the first floor.

- B. Historical Context: The Navy Yard maps of 1886 and 1910 indicate the building in use as the commandant's office and base administration building. A list of the thirty officers who served as commandant from 1873 to 1911 when the Navy Yard closed indicates that three commodores and three rear admirals used the building as their headquarters. Likewise, two lieutenants also served as commandant at various periods during those years. It is not known whether Lieutenant Commander Henry C. Mustin used the building as his office during 1914 after the Old Navy Yard was reopened as the Naval Aeronautical Center and prior to conversion of the building into bachelor officers' quarters in 1915. In 1919 the building was described as bachelor officers' quarters and as an adjunct of the Officers' Club, available for the accommodation of transient pilots and other official visitors. In 1947 the building was described as having a ten room capacity and it continued in use as a bachelor officers' quarters until 1958, when it was converted into a V.I.P. Guest House. A list of the commandants who used the building is as follows:

Commodore M. B. Woosley	(1873-74)
Capt. A. A. Semmes	(1874-75)
Commodore George H. Cooper	(1875-76)
Comdr. J. F. McGlensey	(1876-77)
Capt. George E. Belknap	(1877-81)
Commodore S. P. Quackenbush	(1881-82)
Capt. Alfred Hopkins	(1882-83)
Comdr. William Welsh	(1883-84)
Capt. R. R. Bradford	(1884- )
Lt. Comdr. Wm. C. Gibson	(1884-86)
Capt. E. P. Lull	(1886-87)
Comdr. Chas. L. Huntington	(1888-90)
Lt. J. B. Collins	(1890- )
Capt. A. V. Reed	(1890-93)
Comdr. W. A. Morgan	(1893-94)
Comdr. Wm. H. Whiting	(1894-96)
Comdr. D.W. Mullan	(1896-97)
Lt. J.H. Bull	(1897- )
Comdr. W.W. Reisinger	(1897-1901)

Rear Adm. Frank Wildes	(1901-02)
Rear Adm. C. Wise	(1902-03)
Comdr. C. T. Forse	(1903- )
Capt. F. W. Dickens	(1903-04)
Capt. Thomas Perry	(1904-05)
Capt. R. M. Berry	(1905-06)
Capt. G. A. Bicknell	(1906-07)
Capt. L. C. Logan	(1907-08)
Capt. L. C. Heilner	(1908-09)
Lt. Comdr. R. S. Douglas	(1909-10)
Rear Adm. Lucien Young	(1910-11)

The suite on the upper floor is normally reserved for flag and general officers and a glance at the record of officers who have used the accommodation indicates that many of the admirals of the Navy and generals of the Marine Corps, Army and Air Force have been housed there in the last five or six years. The suites on the lower floor are reserved principally for Navy Captains and their counterparts in the other military services.

Prepared by:

Dr. William S. Coker  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1972

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure was constructed in 1873 to replace the Navy Yard Commandant's Offices, an octagonal building built in 1859, which was destroyed during the Civil War. Square in plan, the existing building is significant with its two stories of peripteral cast-iron columns of its veranda and gallery. In general appearance this structure is identical to the former Marine Hospital in Galena, Illinois, designed by Ammi B. Young.

2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in good condition. The exterior was sandblasted in 1968 and completely repointed above the first floor. Surviving jointing above grade at the foundations under the veranda is of light oyster shell mortar, with the new pointing being concrete mortar filling enlarged joints. The original surface texture of the brick has been lost to the sandblasting. Judging from the thoroughness of the paint removal the original texture was probably smooth, though the brick piers supporting the veranda columns, which are still painted a buff color, are typical unpressed face brick.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main structure, excluding the porches, is nearly square in plan. It measures 48'-8" north and south by 49'-6" east and west. The east-south-west elevations have five bays, while the north elevation has six bays. The structure is two-stories high with the two-story peripteral porches extending 9' from the main structure.
2. Foundations: The foundations which appear above grade are common bond brick. The inaccessibility of the foundation under the first floor veranda has had the effect of preserving some of the original jointing. There are screened vents at each bay on each elevation.
3. Walls: The walls are common bond brick, light salmon in color, with header course every sixth course. The sophistication of the original masonry is evident by the corner quoining with each projecting quoin separated by the header course. In addition there are brick flat arches over all the masonry openings with the voussoirs being a stretcher and header in depth. Plain granite sills are located at the original masonry openings.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick bearing walls and interim brick partitions support the floor joists which are inaccessible, and the roof structure.
5. Porches: The peripteral veranda and the second floor gallery are supported by cast-iron columns spaced with iron railings. The columns, six at each elevation, are similar to the interior cast-iron columns of Building 40, the General Warehouse. At Building 34 the columns are fluted, though, and set on round pedestals which receive the railings. Like Building 40's fluted columns

those of Building 34 have cavetto capitals and exaggerated neckings, a large torus between small cavettos. The base of the columns and the capital of the pedestal are combined into a large roll or edge molding between cavettos. The base, a series of torus and scotia moldings, of the columns has a square, shallow cast-iron plinth set directly on the  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " tongue-and-groove flooring of the veranda and the gallery.

Spaced between the columns at each level, except at each central bay of the veranda, are wrought-iron top and bottom rails,  $9/16$ "x $2\frac{1}{8}$ " in section. Each section of railing is divided into six small sections by vertical  $3/8$ " rods and defined by diagonal rods forming an "X". This crossing is ornamented with a molded back and front rosette, of four bell flowers, each motif being centered on a rod.

Modern wooden steps on a concrete bottom step provide access to each central bay of the veranda.

The gallery eaves are presently boxed, though the 1915 plans and elevation of the structure indicate that there apparently was a crown molding at the eaves. It appears that the gallery floor level was always unmolded, with the flooring overhang, seen in early photos, in the fascia.

The 1915 drawings also indicate the original corner brackets which were set above each column necking, one at each side, and extended to the soffits around the veranda and the gallery. These brackets appear to have been removed during the reconstruction following the 1916 hurricane which caused the porch structure to partially collapse. Presumably the reconstruction of this period also included the installation of the continuous tie rods and turn buckles presently placed behind each column, extending from the foundation piers to the porch roof structure.

6. Chimneys: Presently there are no chimneys visible above the roof line. The 1915 plans and elevation reveal, though, that there were two chimneys rising from the outside walls of the north and south elevations, the flues of which survive in the masonry of the attic space. It is apparent from the lack of chimney breasts in the first and second floor rooms, that the original method of heating was probably by stoves. The chimney stacks in 1915 consisted of a one course wash above a base with the shaft being completed with three courses of corbelled brick above brick dentils.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The existing exterior doorways are at the south facade opening onto the veranda and the gallery but are not shown on the 1915 plans. Both openings appear to have been originally window openings enlarged for doorways in 1931 when the original east and west doorways were closed to provide modern bathrooms in the corridors of both floors. Original granite sills of these doorways survive within the modern brick work of the infilling. The patch brick is buff in color and is used to form the jamb heads and sills of the small bathroom casement windows.

The main entrance at the veranda consists of a pair of glazed double doors with each having a single lower panel with panel molding. There is a two-light transom above a molded transom bar. The flat arch of the opening is constructed of modern gray brick. The character of these entrance doors suggests that they may have been salvaged or reused from some previous remodeling. The second floor gallery doorway has a pair of modern glass jalousie doors under a two-light transom. The frames of both doorways are mitered at the heads and jambs and have molded concrete sills.

- b. Windows: Typically the windows, except the modern bathroom casements, have two-over-two light wooden sash doubly hung within mortise and tenon frames with a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " edge bead. There is no indication of any shutter or blind hardware at the frames which have heavy layers of paint.

Above the porch roof and below the eaves of the main roof there are louvered attic vents at each bay of the masonry openings. The unplastered interior attic walls reveal that the attic vents have a wooden lintel supporting a single row lock course of brick work.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main roof of the building is hipped and is covered with corrugated metal.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is no existing cornice at the main roof, though the 1915 elevation drawing indicates that the original cornice had a crown molding, above a fascia and a bed molding.

- c. Belvedere: A square belvedere is centered on the main roof. The 1915 elevation drawing indicates that it was glazed with two four-light sashes at each elevation which have been replaced by side hinged louvered panels. A crown mold, a cyma recta over a cavetto, survives at the eaves of its hipped roof which originally was topped with a flag pole, the base of which survives within the belvedere structure. The structure itself, of hewn and straight sawn oak, supports the diagonal hip rafters. The hip rafters are supported on additional diagonal braces, except those which are directly on the belvedere structure, which is carried on the brick bearing partitions and extends through the attic space and carry the roof rafters.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. First floor: According to the 1915 plans of this structure the original central hall extended east and west and was orientated toward Building 16. Opening onto this corridor was a suite of three rooms to the north and two rooms separated by an open stair hall on the south. This scheme has been somewhat altered by the closing of the east and west entrances and the installation of bathrooms in the resulting spaces in 1931.

It appears that at that date the original stair was removed and the present stair installed with its reversed run, which was again altered in 1940. The present stair hall has been partitioned from the original cross hall indicated on the 1915 plans, though the closets installed in that year when the building was being converted to bachelor officer's quarters still survive in the rooms, though some partitions have been removed and doors relocated.

- b. Second floor: The second floor originally was similar to the first floor plan as indicated by the 1915 plans, which indicated that along with closets in each room a large northeast room was divided into two rooms and a bathroom was installed in part of the southeast room which opened onto the gallery through east doors. In 1931, the west corridor was closed and a bathroom added along with the previously

mentioned alterations. In 1958, the northwest room was enlarged into a living room by the removal of an original partition and a modern kitchen was constructed within the original stair hall.

c. Attic: The attic, reached by a hatch, is one large space around the belvedere structure. The floor level of the belvedere is reached by a ship ladder.

2. Stairways: The main stairway was installed in 1931 replacing the original stair. The present stair has three square balusters to a tread, and a heavy molded hand rail. The large, square bottom newel, which receives the handrail, is part of the 1931 construction, though the upper newels were installed in 1940 when the landing was altered and provided with two additional runs, one of which was removed in 1958.

The 1931 stair was of a dog-leg construction.

3. Flooring: The first and second floors have 5" wide yellow pine, edge grain flooring which is highly polished and a rich cinnamon in color. The attic is floored in random width (7"-11") 1" thick boards without tongue-and-grooving. Plywood is used in all the 1915 closet floors and ceramic tile is used in all the bathroom floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: In all the main rooms the walls and ceilings are sand finish plaster, probably installed in 1931. The original walls within the 1915 closets still retain a vertical board wainscot. The boarding is 4" wide with  $\frac{1}{4}$ " beading and has a torus over a cavetto chair rail molding 3'-0" above the floor. There is a plain, unmolded  $\frac{9}{2}$ " baseboard around each major room.

All the interior wall and ceiling surfaces, except the high glazed tile wainscot of the bathrooms, probably installed in 1931, and the stair hall, which is wallpapered, are painted white.

5. Doorways and doors: The original interior doorways are fully mortised and tenoned, secured with wooden pins, and are of stile-and-ra construction with four panels having panel molding. The doors are hung under a molded transom bar with a one-light, side hinged

transom sash filling the opening. The trim is edge beaded and has a molded backband.

The 1915 closet doors and trim are similar in character, though not fully mortised and tenoned. They are also not provided with transoms.

6. Decorative features and trim: The trim of the windows is identical to that of the original doorways with the beaded architrave and backband received on a molded window sill with a plain apron. The trim of the door surrounds is received on a simply molded plinth, the height of the baseboard.

A small cavetto molding is used as a cornice in the major rooms which have a 13' ceiling height. It is assumed that run plaster cornices were probably removed during the various remodelings.

7. Notable hardware: All the doors have brass escutcheon backplates, mortised locks, and egg-shaped brass knobs. It appears that this hardware was installed during the 1915 renovations as the closet doors have the same hardware, though the original doors have dutchmen filling earlier hardware mortises. (This particular lockset design is found throughout the older buildings at the station). Cast iron butt hinges are used on all the original doors.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating, air conditioning: There are modern steam radiators throughout the structure and window air conditioning units in the major rooms.
- b. Lighting: The light fixtures are modern, part of the 1958 interior decoration by Betty Southerland Cunningham of Norfolk, Va.
- c. Plumbing: The only early plumbing fixtures appear to be 1931 toilets, while the lavatories in the bathrooms are recent additions. The shower stalls in the bathrooms are of ceramic tile and are separated from the floor area by a low tiled curb in each bathroom.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure was oriented east and west, though the present entrance now faces south and is approached by a circular asphalt drive.
2. Historic landscape design: It appears that the structure was originally surrounded by a paved brick walk, now replaced on the south side by the asphalt driveway. The surviving walk, 6'-2" wide, is laid in a herringbone pattern within stretcher edge pavers. The walk extending from the original west entrance to Center Avenue on an axis with Building 16 is 14'-2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide.

To the south and east of the structure there are several live and laurel oaks of moderate size, while a single yew is strategically placed at each corner of the structure.

3. Outbuildings: There are no immediate outbuildings which can be considered as part of this structure's setting.

Prepared by:

Rodd L. Wheaton  
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Project Supervisor  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
June 1972

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings and other records:

Measured drawings, floor plans and index cards indicating architectural, mechanical/electrical and general work on the building in Engineering Department, Public Works Center, NAS, Pensacola, Florida. Records are basically World War I to present.

Measured drawings, floor plans of the building in Bureau of Yards and Docks Plan Files, Navy Department, on microfilm, copy in Old Military Records Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Drawings and other records of the Navy Yard are numbered 800-1-1 to 800-45-407, Reels 641 through 648.5 (35 mm). Records date from about 1829 to end of World War II.

- B. Early Views: There are five views of the building. Four of the views are in the photographic file of the Naval Aviation Museum, NAS, Pensacola, Florida. The fifth view is in the "Pictorial History of the Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida," a copy of which is in the Commanding Officer's office. (1) a distant view of the building in an overall picture of the naval station about 1916, Negative #000519; (2) a closer view than 1 but details still not very clear, although the roof of the building has been camouflaged. Taken on 8 October 1918, Negative #010064; (3) view probably taken between 1926 and 1931 showing the peripteral screen porch removed from second story and the two chimneys on the north side of the building also removed, Negative #010273; (4) a 1934 view taken at some distance and with most of the house screened by trees, Negative #010028; (5) view is from the "Pictorial History of the NAS" and is the only good closeup view of the building. Probably taken about 1916. No negative number assigned.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building Property Records, Plant Account Office, Public Works Center, NAS, Pensacola, Florida.

Washington, D.C. National Archives. Records Group 45, Entry 336, Old Military Records Branch. Log Pensacola Navy Yard (selected years).

Navy Yard maps, in Bureau of Yards and Docks Plan Files, Navy Department, on microfilm, copy in Old Military Records Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

2. Secondary and published sources:

U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. A Souvenir booklet 1940, prepared by the Pensacola Chapter of the Navy Relief Society and the Gosport, the monthly magazine of the NAS, copy in NAS Library.

U.S. Navy. Annual Reports of the Navy Department. Washington,  
1873-

Young, Lucien. United States Navy Yard and Station. Copy in NAS  
Library, Pensacola. Written in 1910 and published in 1964.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) under joint sponsorship of the National Park Service, The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Florida, and the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board. Measured and drawn during the summer of 1972 under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, by: Rodd L. Wheaton (Architect, HABS), June Project Supervisor; John A. Sanderson (University of Florida), July-August Project Supervisor; Dr. William S. Coker (University of West Florida), Historian; John M. Szubski (Princeton University), Architect; and by Student Assistant Architects: J. Tucker Bishop (University of Texas, Austin); John C. Hecker (University of Illinois, Urbana) and Scott A. Kinzy (University of Nebraska) at the United States Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written descriptive and architectural data in the fall of 1980. Jack Boucher, a HABS staff photographer, took the documentary photographs in March of 1974.

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